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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. LATTA).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,

December 7, 2011.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ROBERT E. LATTA to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2011, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

FLAWED DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT IN PUERTO RICO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIERREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIERREZ. Today I'm sending a letter to Colonel Alfred A. Pantano, the commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Jacksonville, Florida, the district that oversees, among other things, the permitting process for the construction of a massive gas pipeline that will cross the mountains in Puerto Rico. The 92-mile gas pipeline, which does not make any sense environmentally, economically, or ethically, is

moving forward in part because Colonel Pantano's office issued a Draft Environmental Assessment that clearly favors the eventual issuance of the permit.

I would like to read an excerpt from my letter:

"I was intensely angered, but sadly not entirely surprised, when I read the report issued by your office regarding the gasoducto in Puerto Rico. From the start, people in Puerto Rico have been telling me that they suspect all the regulatory oversight is nothing more than show and this process has been assured of passage because of insider cozy relationships between the Army Corps Jacksonville staff and the very industry they are supposed to be overseeing and regulating.

"Further, having sunk millions of dollars in this project already, the ruling party in Puerto Rico's very credibility is at stake on this massive construction project going forward.

"The Draft Environmental Assessment is so slanted and flawed that it adds more evidence to the growing view that there will be no meaningful oversight for this project and no meaningful input from the residents of Puerto Rico.

"I believe your decision, Colonel Pantano, shows a complete disregard for compelling evidence demonstrating little need for the project. It shows disregard for the opinion of other Federal agencies who have looked at the project. The decision disregards evidence of potential safety hazards to the people of Puerto Rico. This woefully slanted decision also gives credence to the suggestion of impropriety in matters related to this project and the inability of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to oversee this project.

"I believe this process should begin again in an open and transparent manner, that the process that has led to the decision should be fully investigated, and further efforts should be

supervised by new leadership. I ask for a U.S. Army Office of Inspector General investigation immediately into the relationship between the government of Puerto Rico, the Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville office, and the power companies and its contractors.

"Lobbyists who used to work for the Army Corps of Engineers should not be allowed to line their pockets at the expense of the safety of the people of Puerto Rico. Your boss, President Obama, stated 'the cozy relationship between the regulators and the industry they regulate must come to an end.'

"I strongly support the President and agree with him completely. However, my misgivings about the pipeline project multiplied substantially when the project was abruptly removed from Army Corps' office in Puerto Rico and transferred to the Jacksonville office in Florida.

"There is clearly a cozy relationship between current Jacksonville staff that you supervise and former Jacksonville staff who now supervise and work for the private company consulted by and hired by the government of Puerto Rico to lobby and provide technical assistance for the project."

The result: The Army Corps of Engineers appears to have adopted all the power company's wholesale argument for moving forward. What a surprise. These include ignoring the advice of other Federal agencies that do not seem to have any cozy connections and relationships to the moneyed interests behind the pipeline, including warnings from the Fish and Wildlife Service—ignored; the Environmental Protection Agency—ignored.

Finally, I point out that it is an insult to the people of Puerto Rico to have released the Army Corps' report in the manner it was released. The report is exclusively in English, whereas the common language in Puerto Rico is

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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